

Working with the Third Sector

A practical guide to working with Third Sector learning providers

Third Sector organisations deliver learning provision that truly reflects the needs of individuals and their communities. That provision is wide-ranging, from nationally recognised QCF qualifications, work placements and apprenticeships to leadership programmes, health and well being programmes and information, advice and guidance. Highly qualified and skilled staff work with tens of thousands of learners each year, including some of the very hardest-to-reach, to provide flexible opportunities and tailored support that helps them derive the maximum benefit from their learning.

"Voluntary and community organisations make a major and literally incalculable contribution to the development of society and to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the nation. They... promote both equality and diversity... help to alleviate poverty, improve the quality of life and involve the socially excluded."

Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England, Home Office Active Community Unit (1998)

The following information highlights the important role that the Third Sector can play in meeting ambitions for a world-class skills base, raising educational achievement, improving health and wellbeing and building cohesive, empowered and active communities.



"The Third Sector is vast, diverse and vibrant. We make huge differences to people's lives, and underpin the prospering communities that are so vital to Britain, both now and in the future. We can be proud of all we have achieved over our long history."

Simon Blake, Chair of Compact Voice

The 'Third' Sector is a term used to denote those organisations that are not 'Private' or 'Public' Sector. These are non-governmental organisations which are primarily motivated by social, environmental or cultural objectives rather than profit, and which generally reinvest any surpluses in furthering those objectives. The sector includes charities of all sizes, voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises, housing associations, co-operatives, community interest groups and mutuals. These organisations may be known as the Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) or 'Civil Society'.

Third Sector learning providers: Key facts

Third Sector organisations make an important - and wide-ranging - contribution, boosting learning and skills and supporting the community cohesion and sustainable development agendas. Their offer includes:

- work-based learning (including apprenticeships)
- specialist provision for learners who need additional support
- employability courses
- further and short courses
- informal adult learning
- community development activities, and
- learning for citizenship.

Provision is delivered through a range of grants and contracts, including the Skills Funding Agency and via government departments including the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry for Justice. Research shows that Third Sector providers are achieving excellent results: a report published by IFF in August 2009 stated that Third Sector achievement rates in further education are higher than in any other sector. Research shows that the third sector is particularly effective in reaching disadvantaged learners. Across the funding streams, third sector learners are more likely to have a learning difficulty or disability, and to be aged over 29. In Work Based Learning and European Social Fund provision, learners tend to be more ethnically diverse and are more likely to live in a deprived area. A 2010 IFF study proved that Third Sector work experience and qualifications directly influence success in finding a job.

Integrated and targeted support

Staff are often highly qualified and specialist in their field. A report by NIACE in 2008 found that most Third Sector providers employ staff with both teaching and subject-specific knowledge. At the same time, many Third Sector organisations combine teaching and learning with other activities and areas of expertise, enabling them to provide learners with an integrated package of support ranging from one-to-one tutoring to mentoring to counselling and debt advice.

Qualitative evidence from the NIACE report also suggests that Third Sector providers value teachers with a wider awareness of, and sensitivity towards, learners' individual circumstances, needs and aspirations. Third Sector organisations combine a commitment to helping all learners achieve their potential - by assessing their needs, providing appropriate support and carefully monitoring their progress - with an understanding based on years of experience of working with specific groups.

Engaging hard-to-reach learners

Third Sector organisations are therefore well placed to attract and engage 'hard to reach' learners, including those from black and minority ethnic groups, those with few or no formal qualifications, unemployed people and those from deprived backgrounds. They are also experienced at working with specific groups, including young people, homeless people, refugees and those with learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health support requirements.

"Previously 'disaffected' learners describe feeling able to engage with third sector provision due to the approachable staff and the one-to-one help that they receive with both learning and personal issues, right from the outset. In smaller classes and an environment that is 'not like school', many of these students discover a new motivation to learn and find work."

Understanding the Contribution of the Third Sector in Learning and Skills.
IFF research for the LSC

Third Sector organisations contribute to learning and skills provision in a number of ways.



Training

Third Sector organisations are delivering training to colleagues across the third, public and private sectors.

In addition to their role as learning providers for the community, Third Sector organisations are also expert training providers **to** the Third Sector. This includes training in management and leadership development, first aid, child protection and charity finance to name just a few areas. Learning and skills commissioning arrangements will benefit from taking this dimension of the Third Sector into account. In addition these learning providers may also be delivering high quality training across the public and private sector. Allowing for training provision that brings all three sectors together will enable effective networking, collaboration and partnership building to take place.

Information

Third Sector organisations are a valuable source of information on the needs of local communities, on the impact of national policies and on what methods work best with particular groups. This intelligence can help shape effective local, regional and national services

Third Sector organisations have a long history of working with local communities to meet needs and improve people's life chances as well as campaigning for change and advocating on behalf of the more vulnerable members of our society. Third Sector organisations are a valuable source of information on the needs of local communities, on the potential impact of national policies and the methods that are particularly effective with certain groups. This intelligence will play a valuable role in shaping effective local, regional and national services.

Information, Advice and Guidance

Third Sector organisations excel in offering tailored information, advice and guidance services that meet the needs of their client groups. They have a track record of designing exciting new approaches and working with whole communities so that young people and parents get the impartial information, advice and guidance about learning and work opportunities that they need, including experiencing those routes at first hand. Third Sector organisations are involved in delivering and receiving information, advice and guidance in a number of ways;

- Third Sector learning providers deliver adult careers guidance or IAG through Nextsteps contracts
- Third Sector organisations support parents and communities to raise aspiration and improve career prospects
- Third Sector staff receive information, advice and guidance on training opportunities and future prospects
- AG providers require up to date information about careers in the Third Sector, internships and other volunteering opportunities to share with clients
- Third Sector organisations are often experts on giving tailored information, advice and guidance to individuals with specific requirements or barriers to employment.

Partnership

Third Sector organisations are valuable partners in collaborative planning for learning and skills provision. Community groups often include service users so can both represent their views and feed information back to the wider community. Working with infrastructure groups such as Community and Voluntary Services and learning consortia is a way of tapping into the knowledge and experience of smaller organisations and their users

Third Sector organisations make effective partners on local boards and strategic partnerships because of their knowledge about local requirements. Many Third Sector community groups are made up of the people who will receive services and can therefore directly represent those needs. They also communicate changes in policy and opportunities for consultation to their users and members. Infrastructure bodies such as Community and Voluntary Services and Learning Consortia can play a vital role in representing smaller organisations, and their users. Through this knowledge, representation and voice they are essential partners in collaborative planning for learning and skills provision.

Provision

Third Sector learning providers are often specialists in their field. This means that they are best placed to deliver learning to particular groups, using well-developed methods, in appropriate locations. They are especially effective at providing alternatives for learners who are harder to reach or are distrustful of statutory provision. For example they have significant success in reaching young people who are not in education, employment and training as they can overcome the barrier of past negative experiences. Because of their capacity to deliver a range of additional activities they can also offer support to those returning to learning and disadvantaged learners.

Specialist Provision

The personalised, flexible approach of third sector providers is central to their success with harder to reach learners. Tailored information, advice and guidance and skilled advisers help students choose suitable courses for their needs and are supported with extra courses such as Key Skills. Learners are supported and monitored so they 'overcome' the barriers that they encounter.

Learners engaged on courses with Third Sector learning providers often benefit from smaller class sizes, one to one support and personalised support towards achievement. The Third Sector specialises in supporting those who require additional support. Third Sector learners are more likely to have a learning difficulty, or disability, are more ethnically diverse and also more likely to be resident in a deprived area. Third Sector providers perform better than their counterparts in terms of achievement rates for learners with a learning difficulty and/or disability (IFF research for the LSC).

Post 19 Learning Provision

"Achievement rates for third sector FE learning aims are significantly higher than those for non-third sector FE learning aims (88% vs. 75%). Furthermore, third sector FE achievement rates have increased significantly since 2004/05, from 78% to 88%, an increase of 10 percentage points."

Contribution of the Third Sector in Learning and Skills.
IFF research for the LSC

Third Sector organisations successfully deliver Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL), Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) and Wider Family Learning (WFL). A survey by North Yorkshire Learning Consortium indicated that many organisations are delivering 'stealth learning' through PCDL that can be used as an initial step to breaking down barriers to engagement, as well as assertiveness and confidence building courses. The Campaign for Learning highlighted the role of the Third Sector in delivering family learning through its 'Family Fusion' project.

Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) was set up in 2003/04 to support community-based learning in the 88 local authorities with the most deprived areas. NLDC has been successfully managed by Third Sector organisations in a number of these areas including Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and St Helens.

The Third Sector already had a significant involvement in Adult Safeguarded learning and this role became even more important in Informal Adult Learning. At a national level, for example, the Workers Educational Association provide over 10,000 courses per year across England and Scotland both in communities and in various workplaces.

At a local level, some Third Sector providers and learning consortia are directly contracted to provide adult safeguarded learning in their local communities. The emphasis tends to be on community capacity building, encouraging civic participation and first steps and engagement programmes.

As well as direct contracted providers and learning consortia, there is a lot of partnership activity between local authorities and Third Sector organisations. In some local authorities, the majority of the adult safeguarded learning is delivered by Third Sector providers.

Apprenticeships in Third Sector organisations provide a strong presence amongst work-based learning providers. Many of these are social enterprises set up specifically to deliver work-based learning. There has been a further influx of new work-based learning providers over the last few years; some of these have been learning consortia which has enabled smaller providers to become engaged with delivery of employer-responsive programmes.

Many former External Institutions and some specialist colleges are from the Third Sector and have received learner responsive and equivalent further education (FE) funding for a long time. When the LSC became responsible for FE it was able to contract directly with non-college providers and this enabled a small number of additional Third Sector organisations, including learning consortia, to become FE providers and subsequently adult learner responsive providers.

Third Sector providers offer a rich variety of learner responsive programmes particularly community based provision, basic skills, foundation learning tier programmes and programmes for disadvantaged learners and communities

The nature and role of learning provision funded through Adult Safeguarded Learning changed significantly from 2011 as the Learning Revolution strategy was fully implemented, how the current review of Further Education and Informal Adult & Community Learning impacts on Third Sector provision remains to be seen.



References & Resources

IFF (2009), *Understanding the Contribution of the Third Sector in Learning and Skills*, Learning & Skills Council

[http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Understanding the Contribution of the Third Sector in LSC - Summary Report.pdf](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Understanding%20the%20Contribution%20of%20the%20Third%20Sector%20in%20LSC%20-%20Summary%20Report.pdf)

IFF (2010), *Third Sector Work Experience*, Young Peoples Learning Agency

<http://www.iffresearch.com/newsitem.php?id=current-news&n=56>

NIACE (2008), *Implementing the QTLS reforms in the Third Sector*, Learning & Skills Council

<http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-QTLSReport-Jul08.pdf>

Third Sector Learning in the East Midlands

The East Midlands Learning Support Network is aimed at organisations that deliver learning programmes and support learners with learning difficulties, disabilities and or mental health support needs.

<http://www.emlearningsupportnetwork.org.uk/>

The East Midlands Learning & Skills Partnership website contains information and links to the Third Sector learning providers in the East Midlands

<http://emlearning.org.uk>